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some "other" industry and reported on his investigation, which invariably served to bring out the necessary elements of success in business as well as the importance of accuracy in statement.

The project that naturally suggested itself for the second semester of this year was the preparation of a booklet as a prospectus for the company. Copies of such booklets were ordered by the score. The stockholders found that getting out such a book required some knowledge of bookmaking, and, besides, all of the good models had actual writing in them, such as poetry and stories. To solve the first problem, they divided themselves into groups, each of which was to investigate some part of bookmaking after the printer had received the material. To solve the second problem, these business people resorted to imitative writing, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and *Rip Van Winkle* being made models for effective stories.

At the end of the year each member of the firm wished a better position, and so he wrote a letter of application. The manner in which the class approached the writing of this final letter and the results of the effort compared with the results of the effort in the formerly used academic method proved that the project-problem method was one solution of the teacher's letter-writing problem. It should be needless to add that the success of this experiment required the activity of the teacher: she was at no time passive, as she could not lose sight of the fact that the project was simply an effective means to an end.

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#### THE ADVANCE OF ENGLISH SPEECH AMONG NEGROES IN THE UNITED STATES

The steady advance of the English language is one of the most remarkable movements in linguistic history. A few centuries ago, it was the coveted possession of a population which occupied a portion of the British Isles. Today it is the language of some one hundred and forty million souls. Starting from the shores of England, it has gone its way, making new conquests and winning enthusiastic adherents of other races and climes.

The present alarm of the purists with respect to the pronunciation of standard English in America, has brought in its wake some very helpful information. While there is no reason to believe that the sweeping reforms of the purists will ever be realized, there is sufficient ground

in their plea for a closer examination of English speech. That it is in a state of change cannot be denied. It could not be otherwise. For in America, the races of the world meet and play their respective parts in the speech of the land. The majority of Americans have no sympathy with those who would manufacture a form of speech and have us all conform to it. Yet it must be admitted that the present condition of the speech of Americans is far from being satisfactory. And since this is the case does it not seem a worthy task for the student to ascertain the status of pronunciation among the many and varied groups of America before launching his program of speech betterment?

In any such study of English speech one can hardly afford to ignore the twelve million negroes who have become an integral part of the country. During the pioneer days of nation-building, the children of the tropics were the slaves of English settlers. In their new English-speaking home they were forced to gain a working knowledge of the spoken word. In their own crude way they grappled with the new tongue and soon began to speak, in broken accent and quaint phrase, the language of their masters. A brief examination of the English spoken on the plantation from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century will be serviceable to us in our survey. The dialect of the plantation is presented because it was in the agricultural districts of the South that this characteristic dialect was most prevalent. Among the slave population *th* and *v* or *f* were softened into *d* and *b*; *v* and *w* were interchanged; the letters *n*, *v*, and *r* were at times added; the final consonant was dropped, *er* was used for *o*; *uh* for *o*; *e* for *o*; *i* for *e*. The following passages will illustrate several of the phonetic peculiarities:

"Let me so *lib dat* when I die I shall *hab* manners what to say when I see my heavenly Lord."

"Let me *lib wid de* musket in one hand and *de* Bible in *de oder*,—*dat* if I die at de muzzle *ob* de musket, die in de water, die in *de* land, I may know I *hab* de bressed Jesus in my hand and *hab* no fear."

This prayer was uttered by a negro soldier during the Civil War and recorded by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in his *Army Life in a Black Regiment*.

Here is another selection taken from one of Dunbar's short stories of plantation life.

"Oomph" said the old man, "reckon you bettah let Jim alone twill dem sins o' his'n git him to tossin' and cryin' and a mou'nin, Den'll be time enough to strive wid him. I's allus willin' to do my pa't Mas' Stuart, but we'n hit comes to ol' time sinnahs lak Jim, I believe in alyin' off, an lettin' de sperit do de stoirin'."

While the extracts quoted above are typical of the speech of the majority of negroes in America up to the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it must not be forgotten that many black folks during the same time were adequately meeting the demands of current standards in English speech. Dr. Carter G. Wordson, of Howard University, in his monumental study on *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, has furnished an abundance of material relative to the progress of the negro during the days of slavery. He has very clearly shown that there were individuals in many sections of the country who were well educated. Judging from the very high estimate placed on their achievements in education by unbiased observers, one is led to the conclusion that they had acquired considerable skill in the pronunciation of English. The dialogue which follows is representative of the speech of one of the many slaves who by contact and study had learned to speak with as much ease and facility as his master.

Mr. J.: I see you have been reading, my lad.

Slave: Yes, sir.

Mr. J.: Well, I have a great curiosity to see what you were reading so earnestly. Will you show me the book?

Slave: To be sure, sir (and he presented it to him very respectfully).

Mr. J.: The Bible! pray when did you get this book; and who taught you to read it?

Slave: I thank God, sir, for the book. I do not know the good gentleman who gave it to me. I was learning to read in town at nights and one morning a gentleman met me in the road as I had my spelling book open in my hand. He asked me if I could read. I told him a little, and he gave me this book and told me to make haste and learn to read it, and to ask God to help me, and that it would make me as happy as anybody in the world.

There has been a marked improvement in English speech among negroes since 1865. However there are certain influences which tend to prolong the belief that for the most part the dialect of plantation days, or a slight improvement upon it, is still the speech of the majority of America's negro citizens. The journals of the country take a big lead in the movement; writers of fiction in treating of contemporary negro life join the chorus; and the photoplay heralds the false doctrine broadcast.

Several forces have been at work in bringing about the improvement. It is difficult to estimate the service rendered by cultivated teachers, preachers, and public speakers. Thousands of untutored negroes during the early days of freedom listened with rapt attention to the

speech of the New England missionary teacher. From these faithful tutors they received the best standards of English speech then current in America. Members of their own group who had lived in the free states also led the way in better habits of speech. A glance at a few passages selected from letters written by negroes of limited education offers some ideas of the present condition of the speech of the most backward of the race.

Sir: the edeter of the paper. i am in the darkness of the south and am trying my best to get out. do you no where about i can get a job in new york. i woud be glad if i coud get a job hear in this beautiful city.

Dear Sir: I am writing you as I would like to no if you no of any R.R. Co and mfg that are in need for colored labors. I want to bring a bunch of race men out of the south we want work some whear north will come if we can git passe any whear across Mason Dickson. Send at once I beg to remain.

Gentlemen: I seen it in the Chicage Defender that if anyone dezire to locat in a small town where they can git fairly good wages and educate there children adress you who needs men and stop paying men 50cts and \$1.00 for job well I want to come ther where I can get work and fairly good wages and educate my children.

Despite their limitation in grammar and spelling, the humble negro toilers who wrote these letters certainly show evidence of progress in the pronunciation of English.

The more conservative advocates of American speech reform can doubtless find some satisfaction in the advancement made by the masses of the negro people in the pronunciation of English. Of course one is not to look for any word of commendation from the purist who is at odds with many forms of speech which have been used by the cultivated class of America for many years. But those who are willing to investigate will find that there is a tremendous difference between the dialect of the slave of 1864 and the English speech of the struggling negro citizen of today.

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